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**Substantive session of 2010**
High-level segment

**Provisional summary record of the 17th meeting (Chamber B)**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 1 July 2010, at 10 a.m.

*President:* Mr. Soborun (Vice-President) ..... (Mauritius)

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General debate

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*In the absence of Mr. Ali (Malaysia), Mr. Soborun (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**General debate**

1. **The President** said that the general debate of the high-level segment was not only the culmination of a long and intense preparatory process but also the starting point for collaborative action. The primary purpose of the high-level segment was to track progress, share practices and accelerate action towards the achievement of the development agenda. The discussion of gender equality and the empowerment of women was taking place at a very appropriate time. The Council had an opportunity to build on the priorities set out by the Commission on the Status of Women based on the 15-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, while looking ahead to the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals in September.

2. There was an increased awareness of the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women in achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), yet all over the world, women and girls were suffering from multiple forms of gender-based discrimination. Though progress had been made since the Beijing conference, there was a need to go much further to overcome the gender-based stereotypes and discrimination that inhibited women and girls from leading the lives they chose. Women's human rights must be put on a par with all other rights.

3. Presentations and discussions during the current session had showed that gender equality and the empowerment of women were indeed an important priority in countries' development strategies. However, there must be broader engagement and dialogue to overcome the challenges faced. Partnerships were key to generating momentum towards achieving the MDGs. He hoped the general debate would provide a platform for launching and strengthening partnerships for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

4. **Mr. Alsaidi** (Observer for Yemen), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, expressed the hope that the current high-level segment of the Council would produce valuable inputs for the upcoming high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on accelerating progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Despite some progress in the advancement of women, many challenges and obstacles remained in the implementation of internationally agreed goals and commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

5. Women continued to constitute a majority of the world's poor. Illiteracy and health remained key issues for women, while violence against women remained a major blight on humanity everywhere. Women continued to face the consequences of conflict, limited access to full employment and decent work, low representation in decision-making positions in local government and the private sector, barriers to the enjoyment of human rights, stereotyped portrayals in the media and environmental degradation and violence, which affected women and girls in particular. Clearly, progress towards achieving internationally agreed development goals was not possible without progress towards gender equality and empowerment of women. In that connection, there was an urgent need for collective action to remove obstacles to the full realization of the rights of women and girls living under foreign occupation.

6. The Group of 77 and China were deeply concerned at the negative impact of the financial, economic, food and energy crises and climate change and natural disasters on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It called for collective action to address those crises and challenges, which affected women disproportionately.

7. The Group of 77 and China, together with the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in the Joint Coordinating Committee, had actively promoted system-wide coherence, including the establishment of a new United Nations gender entity with responsibility for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Such an entity with strong and universal field presence was critical to the strengthening of national capacity for improving the status of women. Once the entity had been established, it was important to ensure the continuation of all current operational activities, field offices and country programmes.

8. Greater efforts were needed to support developing countries in achieving the internationally agreed goals and commitments on gender and the

empowerment of women, including through the fulfilment of all commitments on official development assistance (ODA), debt relief, market access, financial and technical support and capacity-building. It was time for the international community to redouble its efforts to accelerate progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Group of 77 and China, for its part, reaffirmed its commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and other internationally agreed goals and commitments on gender equality and the employment of women.

9. **Mr. Grauls** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey, the stabilization and association process countries Albania and Serbia; and, in addition, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the theme for the Council's high-level segment in 2010, "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women", was particularly relevant since 2010 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the tenth anniversary of the Millennium Declaration and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. The deliberations of the high-level segment could help to place gender equality higher up on the international agenda and provide input for the upcoming review summit on the Millennium Development Goals.

10. Despite substantial progress over the last few decades, the situation of women and girls remained bleak in many respects, including the level of their earnings; access to education, especially at the secondary and post-secondary levels; access to land, property, financial resources and technology; representation in governments and decision-making bodies; opportunities within labour and financial markets; and gender-based violence and rape and other forms of sexual violence. Maternal health was the area where the least progress had been made, particularly in fragile States. In addition, climate change had specific gender dimensions and the current financial and economic crisis was having a gender-specific impact which, if ignored, could undo the progress achieved in gender equality in recent years.

11. To make matters worse, gender equality and women's rights were not adequately integrated in all MDG targets. Ensuring that both women and men had the same opportunities and rights, whether in education, health, social affairs or the economy, would undeniably lead to more economic growth and help attain the targets. In what was a critical year of review and assessment, international organizations, national Governments, civil society and the private sector must all renew their efforts and place gender equality at the centre of the development agenda. The achievement of all the MDGs must be in line with the international community's commitment to realize the full range of women's rights as established by the relevant international treaties and policy documents, rights that the international community had long acknowledged were human rights.

12. In the European Union, equality between women and men constituted a fundamental value enshrined in the European Treaties since 1957. Since that time, the case law of the European Court of Justice had created a legal arsenal for effectively enforcing women's rights in all the States members of the Union. Moreover, a Women's Charter had been adopted in March 2010, covering five areas, namely equal economic independence; equal pay for equal work and work of equal value; equality in decision-making; dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence; and the promotion of gender equality beyond Europe. The Charter would be translated into a new strategy for gender equality between women and men to be presented in the autumn of the current year. In addition, the Union was currently looking into establishing a comprehensive strategy to increase the scale and effectiveness of commitments to combat violence against women, and had recently adopted a Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development for the period 2010-2015 as part of its strategy to achieve the MDGs, especially Goals 3 and 5, as well as to attain the goals set out in other international instruments and documents. The Plan called for States members of the Union to step up their efforts to enhance what had already been achieved and to hasten progress towards gender equality, and provided an operational framework with specific actions, indicators and timetables for each of its objectives. It also provided

for systematic inclusion of gender equality in political and policy dialogues with partner countries to raise awareness and encourage action, and for the involvement of civil society, particularly women's organizations. The Plan of Action provided for efforts to increase technical capacity for gender mainstreaming and to ensure that gender equality issues were part of the annual and multi-annual planning process with partner countries.

13. Through the Plan of Action, the European Union intended to support partner countries in fully implementing the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. It was necessary to provide sustained support for the protection of women in armed conflict as well as for women's participation in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction and in the political arena, which was directly linked to wider development considerations.

14. The MDGs could be achieved only if women were regarded as rights-holders and key agents of change empowered to contribute to development. Consequently, women's equal participation at all levels of decision-making and the strengthening of women's skills and talents were not only a matter of human rights, but could also greatly contribute to addressing the current economic crisis. Educating women and promoting their access to full employment and decent work as well as to credit and resources had a multiplier effect on the economy. The financial crisis should not therefore be an excuse for reducing national budgets or any other funding for the support of gender equality, including women's civil society groups. Furthermore, the sharing of responsibilities between women and men not only enhanced the quality of life for all, but also increased women's opportunities regarding education, training, self-care and political activities, and thereby contributed to the achievement of the MDGs and the well-being of the population at large.

15. Equal participation and equal sharing of responsibilities could not be achieved if women did not have proper access to health-care services and information. Universal access to reproductive health and an effective response to the feminization of the HIV/AIDS epidemic were essential in that regard. Studies had shown a link between increased levels of mother's education and chances of child survival with the subsequent positive effect on Goal 4.

16. The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment was a central aim of the United Nations. The European Union therefore welcomed the agreement that had been reached on the establishment of a new United Nations gender entity within the broader context of system-wide coherence. It looked forward to strong performance by the entity and pledged its support for the smooth functioning of its Board. Strong leadership of the entity would be essential from the very start.

17. More reliable gender-disaggregated data was needed to identify gender inequalities in the achievement of the MDGs. It was to be hoped that the new gender entity would offer support to countries for the collection of such data.

18. The European Union was firmly committed to support the achievement of the MDGs globally by 2015. As the MDGs were interlinked and mutually dependent and reinforcing, they therefore required a holistic, rights-based approach that took into account local contexts. The Union was firmly committed to gender equality as a human right, a question of social justice, a driver for peace and development and a core value of its development policy.

19. **Mr. Acharya** (Observer for Nepal), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that those countries looked at the issue of gender equality and empowerment of women from the comprehensive perspective of the MDGs, development financing and their overall development process. The least developed countries attached great importance to the Council's deliberations as an input for the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals to be held in September. Given the worsening of the situation since the last Development Cooperation Forum, a great many countries were far from meeting the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs as they related to women. The challenges in that connection were greatest in vulnerable countries like the least developed countries, where women bore the brunt of poverty and deprivation owing to structural constraints and capacity limitations and the absence of predictable financing. National leadership and domestic financing were crucial but were starkly insufficient given the magnitude of the problems. There was therefore an urgent need to meet the ODA targets for the least developed countries, as agreed in the Brussels

Programme of Action, as the minimum necessary to address their particular vulnerabilities.

20. The least developed countries had the largest number of the absolute poor, the majority of whom were women. That constituted a huge obstacle to their attainment of the MDGs. The impact of the multiple crises had been devastating for the poor in vulnerable countries, especially women. Such countries had no capacity to withstand the shocks on their own and hence priority must be accorded to them in the provision of development financing.

21. The Economic and Social Council had a role to play in ensuring policy coherence with regard to the various issues that had a bearing on gender empowerment. More harmonized cooperation would be welcome from the development partners in support of country-led national development strategies. Accountability, transparency, unconditionality and use of the national systems were critical to ensuring effective results on the ground. Coherence also meant that development financing should look at social and human development, including gender empowerment, on the one hand, and productive capacity-building, infrastructure and sustainable and rapid economic growth, on the other, as women were the main household managers in many countries. Development policies must not be undercut by unfavourable and counterproductive policies on trade, finance, agriculture and technology transfer, among others. At the same time, efforts must be stepped up to strengthen institutions to support national will, priorities and ownership, including in areas of relevance to women and girls.

22. He called for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Much remained to be done in the areas of literacy, violence against women, constraints on women's access to full employment and decent work, and representation of women in decision-making positions in the government and private sectors. Environmental degradation affected women in particular. Integration of women into the development mainstream required a multi-faceted approach to women's empowerment by raising their social, economic, political and legal status. National mechanisms for gender equality and empowerment of women continued to face constraints and challenges owing to inadequate human and financial resources. A collective commitment and strong support mechanisms at the international level were indispensable for gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women.

23. In order to meet the current challenges, a number of things were needed. Firstly, there must be urgent fulfilment of the commitment to development financing. The most vulnerable countries like the least developed countries should be given due priority, as they had the least capacity to deal with the crises to which they did not contribute and which affected women in particular. Secondly, the international support mechanism must deal with the crises from both the short-term and long-term perspectives. Long-term support for agriculture, rural infrastructure and market access for agriculture products was critical for empowering women. Thirdly, official development assistance, which was probably the only stimulus that the least developed countries had, should be ramped up in favour of them. Fourthly, greater efforts and resources were needed to support the achievement by the least developed countries of the internationally agreed goals and commitments on gender and empowerment of women. Lastly, the least developed countries looked forward to the establishment of a United Nations gender entity with a strong focus on supporting national programmes to enhance the capacity for gender equality and empowerment of women.

24. **Ms. Skalli** (Morocco) emphasized the need to coordinate the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs, since gender equality was a cross-cutting issue in all the Goals. The promotion of women's rights was the way to build a fairer world with greater solidarity, requiring a new national and global governance designed and implemented with the broad participation of women.

25. Morocco had an agenda geared to equality and promotion of human rights. That goal was being pursued by means of legislative reform, including reform of the Family and Nationality Codes, a strategy to combat violence against women and gender stereotypes, measures to reduce maternal mortality, gender-based budgeting, parity in the management of local public affairs and systematic efforts to promote the participation of women in decision-making at all levels. The aim of the National Human Development Initiative was to eliminate disparities between urban and rural areas and between men and women by

combating poverty, precariousness and exclusion and promoting local capacity-building. Thanks to that inclusive, participatory and gender-sensitive approach, Morocco's prospects for achieving the MDGs by 2015 were good.

26. Most of the world's poor were women. Yet women possessed valuable assets, intelligence and skills that were being under-utilized for sustainable development and preservation of the environment. The movement towards equality should be the catalyst for a new world that was fairer, more human and more inclusive.

27. **Mr. Khan Khosa** (Pakistan) said that his country's Constitution guaranteed equal rights for all citizens and ensured full participation of women in all spheres of national life. The strategy for gender equality and empowerment of women included reducing the feminization of poverty, promoting gender equality, ending violence against women and implementing legislative reform to empower women.

28. Pakistan had a National Plan of Action to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as a National Commission on the Status of Women. Women were playing an increasing role in every sphere of life and Benazir Bhutto had been the first female Prime Minister in the Muslim world. Laws had recently been adopted to protect the rights of women, with the involvement of all stakeholders including civil society organizations. A programme providing cash grants to female heads of poor households enhanced their decision-making role. Another initiative was a programme for the grant of State land to poor women tenant farmers in rural areas. The functional literacy of adult women had improved considerably. A coherent gender reform agenda was being implemented, including political participation, institutional restructuring, women's employment in the public sector and gender-responsive policy and budgeting.

29. The troubled state of the global economy and the resulting reduction in resource flows to the developing countries gave particular significance to the Council's Development Cooperation Forum, which should become a platform for a real and meaningful dialogue on global development cooperation. His delegation also looked forward to the review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 to be conducted at the sixty-fifth session.

30. Pakistan welcomed the creation of the new United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which should promote gender equality and empowerment in a more coordinated and coherent fashion throughout the world. He emphasized the need for increased international cooperation and fulfilment of development assistance promises as a major catalyst for implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women.

31. **Ms. Freire** (Brazil) said that Brazil was on course to attain the MDGs in 2015, thanks to the government strategy giving priority to social justice. There had been considerable improvements in the country's macroeconomic and social indicators. The Family Grant Programme, a direct income transfer programme, financed prenatal care, nutrition and health counselling and school attendance and focused on women, who best knew the needs of the family. Women were increasingly involved in education at all levels, and were in the majority at the secondary and higher levels. A programme to promote gender equity in employment was designed to achieve equal opportunities for men and women in public and private organizations, by developing new management concepts and practices and a new organizational culture. A national network established under the Maria da Penha Act and known as the National Violence against Women Pact provided shelters, referral centres, legal advice and a free telephone hotline, ("*Ligue 180*"), for female victims of violence. Maternal mortality was expected to decline by 15 per cent by 2011. A plan to reduce the number of cases of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases was receiving support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

32. The new United Nations Gender Entity should provide better advice to Governments, administer larger resources and maintain a significant country presence.

33. **Mr. Paet** (Estonia) observed that, in the context of various crises, the advances made in gender equality and women's rights were among the first to disappear. However, some progress had been made.

34. The United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women had

brought together judges from several African countries, raising awareness about an often unconscious gender bias in legal reasoning. Although the project had come to an end, the participants had continued to practise the "jurisprudence of equality" in their courts after forming an association for that purpose.

35. Despite progress in women's political participation, gender issues were often neglected by decision makers. Gender-responsive budgeting was therefore important to ensure that economic policy took into account the different circumstances of women and men and that pledges of gender equality were actually backed with resources.

36. Governments, civil society and the private sector should work together; civil society organizations that demanded and monitored gender-sensitive policies helped to keep the focus on gender issues. Both women and men in leadership positions should lead by example and the media could also encourage women and weaken stereotypes by portraying women not solely as victims of poverty and violence but as key players in the economy and development.

37. Estonia welcomed the agreement on the new Gender Entity. His country had been a financial contributor to UNIFEM and would provide support to the new Entity. It urged the Secretary-General to appoint a capable and visionary head of the Entity without delay.

38. Gender equality continued to be a priority of Estonia's activities in the field of human rights as well as in development cooperation. Estonia had several bilateral projects in Afghanistan dedicated to improving women's health. It continued actively to advocate incorporation of the gender dimension in all United Nations activities and was establishing a national action plan to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

39. **Ms. Carfagna** (Italy) welcomed the agreement on the establishment of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which could be a crucial development promoting women's rights worldwide, and expressed the hope that the entity would be operational and effective as soon as possible.

40. Every Millennium Development Goal was directly or indirectly linked to women's rights: societies with gender equality had a much better chance of attaining the Goals by 2015. It was regrettable that, in many parts of the world, there had been no progress towards the Goals.

41. In 2010 — which was the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion — many schemes giving women access to microcredit had been introduced in national and international programmes. The Permanent Italian Committee for Micro-Credit had been established in response to General Assembly resolution 53/197 proclaiming 2005 the International Year of Microcredit.

42. Italy was concentrating on closing the existing gaps and on widening opportunities for women in social, economic and productive contexts and within institutions. It was also extending essential services and strengthening health-care structures to protect girls and women. Italy believed that female education was a powerful way of creating a supportive environment to protect the health of mothers and infants. Italy's Ministry for Equal Opportunities had taken measures to strengthen services to help working mothers and their families and had imposed severe penalties on employers who discriminated in the workplace.

43. The international community must make even greater efforts to reduce the high rates of maternal and infant mortality and to combat violence against women at home, in the workplace and on the street. Efforts to empower women must not neglect the rights of young girls and it must be remembered that gender inequality represented a cost to national economies.

44. **Ms. Fedak** (Poland) said that, in the 15 years since the Beijing Conference, the social issues of domestic violence, violence against women and human trafficking had become known to a wide public and ceased to be the private problems of the victims. Gender-related issues had become part of government agendas and the equal treatment of women was no longer just a women's issue.

45. Poland's activities to promote equal opportunities for women and men included those related to the improvement of women's status, equal employment opportunities for women and men, elimination of gender stereotypes and promotion of the issue of gender equality. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy funded activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to promote equal economic and social opportunities for women. Congresses of Polish

Women had been held in 2009 and 2010 and followed up at regional conferences.

46. Women's participation in national decision-making processes was still too limited to influence important decisions and on average only 60 per cent of women were active in the labour market. The Beijing Declaration had stated that increasing poverty was affecting the lives of the majority of the world's peoples, in particular women and children; that statement was still relevant in the current economic crisis. Gender equality was not only relevant to the issues of diversity and social justice but also constituted a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable economic growth, employment, competitiveness and social cohesion. A gender equality policy should therefore be considered as a long-term investment rather than a short-term liability.

47. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that her country had eliminated gender disparity in secondary education and hoped to do the same in primary and tertiary education by 2015. Access to education had also been improved.

48. However, despite the progress made, challenges and obstacles remained. Women were still more likely than men to be unemployed or working in vulnerable jobs in the informal sector and they were also the worst paid. Women did not have access to credit and thus had difficulty starting their own businesses. They were also most likely to be affected by the HIV pandemic and gender-based violence. There were few opportunities for women to enter public life and politics.

49. Gender equality was one of the major challenges impeding the attainment of the MDGs. The Namibian Government reaffirmed its commitment to the effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and other internationally agreed goals and commitments on gender equality and empowerment of women.

50. **Ms. de Abreu** (Mozambique) endorsed the policy recommendations made in the Secretary-General's report (E/2010/49), providing guidance for national efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Since poverty disproportionally affected women, concerted regional and global efforts were needed to complement national action to eradicate poverty and other obstacles to the attainment of internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

51. The Mozambican Government had achieved notable success in increasing women's representation in the Government and Parliament. The country had had a woman Prime Minister from 2004 to 2010 and the current Speaker of the Parliament was a woman. The Government had established national machinery for women's empowerment and gender equality, developed gender equality policies, reviewed discriminatory legislation and developed gender strategies relating to health, education, agriculture, energy, environment and climate change. The results of the girl child education programme were particularly encouraging. Maternal and child mortality had declined and poverty was being reduced. However, more needed to be done and Mozambique was expanding efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and to improve education and training for girls and women.

52. The United Nations, and particularly the Economic and Social Council, must continue to assist national efforts to enhance the participation of women in poverty eradication, climate change adaptation and mitigation and promotion of sustainable development. There must be renewed political will to accelerate the attainment of the MDGs.

53. Her delegation welcomed the establishment of the Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which should ensure adequate support and critical assistance to Governments in the implementation of their strategies and programmes for the advancement of women, gender equality and realization of women's human rights.

54. **Mr. Yakovenko** (Russian Federation) said that specific measures needed to be elaborated to overcome the gender consequences of the global economic crisis and protect women's rights. His Government attached special importance to United Nations efforts to combat violence against women, and shared the view that each Member State should elaborate its own strategy in that regard. It believed that the new gender entity of the United Nations should have universal geographical coverage since there was no State that was entirely free of women's rights violations.

55. His Government fully shared the understanding of gender equality as a key element in achieving sustainable socio-economic development; it was committed to improving the situation of women and achieving gender equality at the domestic level and was implementing priority projects in the areas of

health, education, housing and agriculture. It believed that even at a time of economic crisis, women should be able to achieve their full potential through an optimal balance between family life and outside employment. To that end, special refresher courses were being developed for women caring for children in order to facilitate their return to the workforce.

56. Women provided a solid foundation in many sectors of the Russian economy, especially small and medium-sized enterprises and the civil service, and were becoming increasingly prominent in the legislature, political parties and social structures. The Ministry of Health and Social Development, the Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of Agriculture were all headed by women and the governors of two of the most highly developed regions were women.

57. Efforts were being made to create a sustainable demographic situation through integrated measures to provide medical care for women with children, improve reproductive health and offer financial incentives to boost the birth rate, which had increased in 2009.

58. His Government was paying special attention to the prevention of violence against women, including domestic violence, with the objective of eliminating the root causes of violence and adopting the necessary legislative, political and practical measures. Law enforcement, health, education and social bodies were involved in those efforts, as well as women's NGOs and their network of non-governmental crisis centres.

59. The promotion of gender equality meant creating conditions for women to enjoy their rights and pursuing policies that would lead to economic growth and prosperity. To achieve that goal, consolidated efforts of all Member States were essential. Only then would women have not only the right to equality, but also the possibility of fully exercising that right.

60. **Ms. Algayerová** (Slovakia) said that gender imbalances in decision-making processes and elsewhere persisted, as well as gender stereotypes, which led to gender segregation in education and in the labour market. Distorted perceptions of policy objectives, often insensitive to gender and culture, were being put forward, and the long-term goals of the prevention and elimination of discrimination remained elusive.

61. Despite the successes achieved in the area of gender equality and equal opportunities in Slovakia, relatively strong gender stereotypes still persisted. Her Government recognized that the legislation in place needed to be supported by more specific activities in order to incorporate a gender perspective into daily life. For example, since 2000 the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family had offered an annual award to employers to motivate them to create family-friendly working conditions.

62. Her delegation was firmly convinced that the establishment of the new gender entity would help harmonize the management and overall functioning of the United Nations gender architecture. It was of the utmost importance that the international community should understand that development was conditional upon the full realization of the rights of all human beings and that gender equality was a precondition for sustainable growth. Discussions of equality must not be sidelined by the current world economic problems; resources must be found for achieving the fifth Millennium Development Goal. Such investment should be seen as an investment in peace and sustainable development. Her delegation welcomed and supported the draft Ministerial Declaration of the 2010 high-level segment entitled "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women".

63. **Mr. Farahi** (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said that over the past three decades, with the participation of women legislators, the Iranian Parliament had enacted a broad range of legislation in support of women and the family. His Government attached great importance to creating conditions for women's equal access to all economic opportunities and had provided for specific measures, in law and in practice, to achieve internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. As a result, women's education and literacy rates had improved and there had been a rapid increase in the number of girls entering higher educational institutions, there was full medical coverage for families in rural areas, maternal and infant mortality rates had been reduced, women's life expectancy had increased and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS was very low. The economic participation of women had increased sharply over the past 10 years. His Government had implemented policies for employment

generation, skills and vocational training and the strengthening of women's cooperatives, especially for rural women.

64. His Government was making great efforts to uproot poverty and promote social justice. Iranian women were entitled to support in cases of poverty, divorce and disability. Particular attention was being paid to the expansion of the insurance system and women's social services; priority was accorded to female-headed households. His Government had adopted specific measures to alleviate poverty among low-income women through an employment policy for female-headed households, job creation and capacity-building for women entrepreneurs and support for rural women's cooperatives.

65. Iranian women had advanced significantly in terms of political participation over the past decade. The proportion of women in senior government, managerial and executive positions had increased, and women had been appointed to ministerial positions and as provincial governors. The number of non-governmental organizations involved in women's issues had risen sharply and there was also increasing participation of women in the arts and in sports.

66. **Mr. Kmoníček** (Observer for the Czech Republic) said that his Government was committed to the Millennium Development Goals, despite the global economic crisis, and had contributed approximately US$ 224 million for official development cooperation in 2009. During the period 2010-2017, it would accord priority to such sectors as environment, agriculture, socio-economic development and support to democracy, human rights and social transformation. Its efforts would focus on best practices and lessons learned, and also on challenges and opportunities. It was convinced that the Millennium Development Goals could not be achieved on the basis of development cooperation alone, and financial flows from the advanced countries; effective partnership and ownership were needed on the part of the partner countries, which must themselves ensure good governance, the rule of law, regular assessment reviews and action-oriented national strategies.

67. His Government believed that the experience from transition towards democratically governed society could be used even more widely in the European Union's development policy; support for democracy and human rights were important areas of Czech policy towards developing and transition countries. It supported the full participation of women in decision-making processes in all sectors.

68. Combating violence against women was a prerequisite for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; there was an important synergy between the economic, social and political empowerment of women and combating violence against them. Educated and economically independent women were less likely to become victims and more likely to use the tools to gain protection when needed. The elimination of all forms of violence against women must remain at the core of the struggle against discrimination against women.

69. **Mr. McMullan** (Australia) said that Australia recognized that collective efforts through the United Nations were critical to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women; robust institutional mechanisms must underpin those efforts. It welcomed the decision to establish a new United Nations gender entity which would provide a strengthened and integrated platform for advancing work on gender issues at the international and national levels. It supported greater participation and the independent status of national human rights institutions in the Commission on the Status of Women, since they played an important role in holding governments to account and helping to achieve gender targets.

70. Education was a key component of gender equality and the empowerment of women; all children worldwide must have access to primary education. Education could create opportunities for children to escape the cycle of poverty and allow women and girls to achieve their full potential. Australia had substantially increased its funding of education through its overseas development assistance programme to $744 million in 2010.

71. Achieving better health outcomes for women and girls was also essential, particularly in the area of maternal mortality and morbidity. Australia had supported the development of an investment case for maternal, newborn and child health in the Asia and Pacific region and was promoting access to reproductive health services and working with partner countries to improve the performance, affordability and accessibility of health systems for women and girls.

72. Women living with disabilities could face multiple forms of discrimination. Australia had a five-

year strategy to assist disabled persons, tackling the challenges of disability as well as poverty. The elimination of violence against women was also critical to closing the gender gap and producing better development outcomes; Australia was developing a national plan to reduce such violence and contributing to international efforts towards that end. He announced a contribution of $1.25 million to the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. His delegation was pleased that the trust fund strategy placed priority on building and disseminating knowledge in the area of ending violence against women.

73. **Mr. Keya** (Observer for Kenya) said that the overriding objective of Kenya's economic and social development was to improve the quality of life of the people, particularly women and children. His Government believed that gender equality was an essential condition for inclusive, democratic, violence-free and sustainable development; it therefore paid specific attention to women's needs and contributions in order to address the gender gap and eliminate the discrimination that historically had disadvantaged women and distorted development.

74. In order to break the vicious cycle of poverty, discrimination and violence against women, there must be changes in social attitudes. Kenya had embarked on a systematic process to bring about such changes through political, legislative, administrative and policy measures aimed at mainstreaming gender perspectives in all aspects of Kenyan life. A referendum to decide on a new Constitution to be held in early August 2010 would provide a unique opportunity to incorporate gender equality in the basic law in order to facilitate the more equitable and representative participation of women at all levels of Kenya's democratic national governance.

75. Kenya abhorred violence against women and supported all initiatives to combat such violence. Such initiatives must be more fully coordinated in order to ensure coherence and take advantage of the synergies created. Men and boys must be aggressively engaged in addressing violence within the family and community.

76. Women in rural areas faced the challenges of caring for children and the elderly while engaging in farming and other economic activities, often without remuneration. Gender-responsive policies and programmes must continue to be implemented to promote women's economic empowerment including through access to markets, participation in microenterprises, equal pay for work of equal value and the sharing of unpaid work. The participation of women in public life, economic empowerment and access to microcredit and to health services must be actively promoted.

77. Kenya supported the current efforts to establish a global plan of action to deal with the intractable problem of trafficking in persons. It would continue to support the efforts by the United Nations system with a view to achieving a more coordinated and coherent system that punished the perpetrators and rehabilitated the survivors.

78. Since the majority of those affected by natural disasters were women and children, gender sensitivity must be entrenched in the response system in order to provide protection and increase quality interventions so as to hasten transition from relief dependency to development.

79. Kenya had consistently raised concerns about the risk that the Millennium Development Goals relating to maternal health and child mortality might not be achieved and, as a consequence, gains made in other areas might be reversed. Countries such as Kenya which were on the threshold of making significant gains needed to be supported. Gender equality and the empowerment of women, as a cross-cutting issue, was one of the most effective ways of achieving the Goals. Kenya welcomed the establishment of the new gender entity within the United Nations.

80. **Ms. Silkalna** (Observer for Latvia) said that her delegation welcomed the recent consensus to establish the new gender entity, which would strengthen the position of gender equality issues in the United Nations and its Member States. It believed that 2010 was the last chance to launch a revitalized and concerted effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

81. In many respects, Latvia was a positive example of gender equality and women's empowerment as women were well represented in the academic, judicial and political spheres. At the same time, challenges remained, notably the risk of poverty, particularly for vulnerable groups such as pensioners, the disabled, single-parent families and large families, and all sectors of society affected by the economic downturn. It was hoped that as employment levels began to

improve, the risk of poverty would be gradually reduced.

82. Gender equality was an integral principle of Latvia's development cooperation. In recent years, Latvia had been sharing its experience with other countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Georgia, encouraging women in those countries to become more economically and politically empowered.

83. **Ms. Freudenschuss-Reichl** (Observer for Austria) said that the Millennium Development Goals could not be achieved without ensuring the full participation of women and girls and full realization of their potential as agents for change. Even in countries where the achievement of the Goals was on track, the most vulnerable, including women and girls, were being left on one side.

84. Her Government was especially concerned about the increasing feminization of HIV/AIDS, which was closely related to gender discrimination and social restrictions as well as insufficient access to sexual and reproductive health. It was therefore of crucial importance to focus on gender aspects in efforts to combat HIV/AIDS; international commitments must be further translated into national legal frameworks and action plans. Her Government hoped that the XVIII International AIDS Conference, to be held in Vienna in July 2010, would contribute to highlighting the critical connection between women's rights and the pandemic.

85. The fate of women affected by armed conflicts and their role in peacebuilding processes continued to be a priority of Austrian foreign policy and development cooperation. Women were not only victims in armed conflicts but also important actors in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, yet they were often systematically excluded from decision-making and peacebuilding efforts. Austria had taken relevant initiatives at the national, regional and international levels in that regard.

86. Within its bilateral cooperation, Austria had to face the reality that at the local level, there were tremendous disparities in terms of poverty and gender indicators. Increased decentralization, local participatory governance and community-driven development were needed to promote the aims of gender equality.

87. Austria welcomed the establishment of the new United Nations gender entity and hoped that it would give a strong impetus to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women at all levels and promote more effective coordination, coherence and gender mainstreaming across the United Nations system.

88. **Ms. Renford** (Observer for Israel) said that sustainable development could be achieved only in conjunction with the empowerment of women, which must be an ongoing priority. Israel was implementing policies to facilitate the advancement of women, gender equality, growth and development; Mashav, the Israeli agency for international development cooperation, was working to promote those issues and contribute to the advancement of the Millennium Development Goals. It viewed capacity-building in the area of microentrepreneurship and the provision of support systems as major tools in tackling the cycle of poverty and to that end was conducting training activities for women's empowerment both in Israel and in the developing world. In conjunction with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the Organization of American States, it was working on activities to foster entrepreneurship for women from Central Asia and the Caucasus regions and in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was exploring a partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to promote teacher training in sub-Saharan Africa and, in 2011, would be hosting a conference on women, education, training, science and technology in cooperation with UNESCO. It was also working with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to offer international training workshops that addressed the feminization of HIV/AIDS and taught participants how to address the specific needs of women and girls.

89. **Ms. Daza** (Observer for the Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that her Government believed that the economic development model promoted by the industrialized countries, which had given rise to economic and climate crises, needed to be changed. Bolivia was implementing a new development model, within a context of the strengthening of democracy. The new Constitution recognized gender equality and women's right to development as an integral part of universal human rights and an essential part of the building of a new society based on the values of complementarity, equality, inclusion and solidarity. Women were strongly represented in the decision-

making structures of the new State. The 2006-2007 national development plan had focused on the needs of the historically excluded groups, in particular indigenous women in rural areas, where there was the highest incidence of poverty. Bolivia had achieved a significant reduction in extreme poverty. Programmes were in place to provide financial assistance to vulnerable groups of the population and reduce levels of maternal and infant mortality. Illiteracy had been completely eliminated.

90. Bolivia's achievements confirmed its international commitments to ensure women's empowerment and equality, which could be achieved only under an inclusive and redistributive development model, with broad social participation. His Government supported the establishment of the new gender entity within the United Nations, which should carry out integrated actions in line with the situations in the respective countries.

91. **Mr. Chave** (Observer for Switzerland) said that his delegation was pleased to note the growing number of women active in legislative, executive and judicial bodies the world over. In the private sector, however, there had been only a slight increase in the presence of women on company boards and in upper management; that trend must accelerate. Moreover, the progress achieved in different regions of the world had been insufficient and uneven; it was also very fragile, and was especially threatened by the current crises. Women were often the first to suffer poverty and unemployment, particularly in developing countries. A continued commitment was therefore necessary.

92. Among the health indicators, maternal health showed most clearly the glaring differences between rich and poor countries. The upsurge in violence against women was alarming; access to health care and education remained more restricted for women and girls than for men and boys; and the great majority of school drop-outs were girls.

93. To address those challenges, rights-based approaches were needed that strengthened the capabilities and the autonomy of women and ensured their access to public services and economic resources, enabling them to participate fully in political life and in society as a whole. At the economic level, it was necessary to recognize and enhance the status of unpaid work, done mostly by women, within families and communities. In its development cooperation, Switzerland was committed to achieving greater recognition of that work in its countries of intervention so that the role of women would become more visible and would be taken into account in political decision-making, leading to greater access for women to economic resources. Development cooperation activities must be directed to support partner countries in integrating the gender dimension into all economic policy areas. Switzerland therefore supported its partner countries in the implementation of gender-based budgeting methods.

94. Switzerland welcomed the agreement on the establishment of the new gender entity that would enable the United Nations, in partnership with Member States, to make a more effective contribution towards achieving equal opportunities between men and women and the empowerment of women.

95. **Ms. Sayinzoga** (Rwanda), welcoming the establishment of the new United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, said that her delegation noted with concern the impact of the ongoing global crises on gender equality, the empowerment of women and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as the uneven progress made towards the MDGs, especially Goals 3, 5 and 6. Women must be fully integrated into the formal economy, especially in terms of economic decision-making, and the quantitative and qualitative measurement of non-remunerated and informal work not recorded in the national accounts should be improved.

96. The role and contribution of rural women was key to enhancing agriculture and rural development, improving food security and eradicating poverty. Implementation gaps must be closed by strengthening political support for gender equality and the empowerment of women and by mainstreaming a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all national policies and programmes in the political, economic and social spheres. In that connection, gender-sensitive policies and programmes should be developed to ensure equal access by women to adequate housing, property and land, including in respect of inheritance rights and access to credit. Legal frameworks for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women should also be established and strengthened, and efforts should be made to improve and systematize the

collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data.

97. While Rwanda was recognized as a success in the area of gender equality, the need to reduce poverty, which affected the economic empowerment of women, was an ongoing challenge that her Government was seeking to address.

98. **Ms. Head** (Observer for the International Right to Life Federation) stressed that it was essential to the achievement of several MDGs and to women's empowerment that women in the developing world should have access to maternal and child health care of the standard available to women in the developed world.

99. Although maternal mortality was slowly decreasing, the figures were still shockingly high, and the claim that legalizing abortion would reduce maternal mortality in the developing world was simply untrue. It was the lack of modern medicine and quality health care, not the prohibition of abortion, which resulted in high maternal mortality rates. Moreover, legal abortion did not mean safe abortion. Women still died from abortions and many suffered terrible physical, emotional or psychological wounds as a result. Women in many parts of the world needed clean water, nutrition and health care for themselves and their families, not the "right" to violently destroy their children before birth.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*